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Coaching Girls
Coaches` Supplement
for The Norwegian Tennis Association`s project
"Girls` Tennis"

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PREFACE

Girls` Tennis project

Aims

To improve conditions for girls and boys both in training and competitions, in Norwegian tennis, but with the main focus on the girls.

Research in the USA at colleges and high schools, in connection with Title IX, shows that if what is on offer is good enough, just as many girls as boys, are interested in and participate in sport.

If we can ensure that what is on offer for girls suits them we should, over time, be able to get as many girls competing in tennis as boys.

How can we achieve this?

1. Aim to improve coaches` knowledge, proficiency and attitudes for coaching girls. Edvard Raastad has written the coaches` supplement "coaching girls."
2. A plan of action for clubs suggests how clubs can improve conditions for girls.
3. Clubs will be invited to participate in a pilot project, with economic assistance from the Norwegian Tennis Association. The pilot project involves the implementation of the coaches` supplement and plan of action in the clubs.

Mary Andreassen
Project Leader

1. INTRODUCTION

This supplement to the Norwegian Education Scheme for coaches is based on both national and international sources (tennis and other sports,) primarily in consultation with Professor Kari Fasting and Sports Psychologist Marit Sørensen at the Norwegian University of Sport. International sources include Tennis Australia, Sanex WTA Tour, USTA, ITF and the Women`s Sports Foundation.

The background for the project is as follows:

There is a high dropout rate in girls` tennis, especially when it comes to participation in tournaments. Girls start to drop out from the age of 14-15, whereas in Sweden it is from the age of 16-17. Dropping out is also a problem among boys. Regarding both sexes, in the age group 13-19 years, there were in 2001 only about 16% (615 players of a total membership of 3700) who played in tournaments. The dropout rate is higher for girls.

When it comes to tournament participation under the age of 18 in ranking tournaments in 2001, more than three times as many boys as girls took part. Even though there is a general dropout problem in both genders, it should first and foremost be a prime object to seek to solve the problem with regard to girls, with a view to improving their situation related to training and competitions. If we place girls` tennis on the agenda as the most important area on which we should concentrate, we can hopefully find causes and define the consequences of the dropout problem **for both genders**.

There is clear documentation that participation among girls, as players, leaders and coaches, is declining. Even though we may have many girls attending the tennis schools, few girls take part in tournaments, particularly in the older junior classes and in the senior class. Moreover, there is a huge shortage of female coaches.

This is why NTF has given priority to "Girls` Tennis" as one of their areas of concentration in their General Sports Plan. The Norwegian Tennis Association, with Mary Andreassen as the person responsible for the project, has up to now received some financial support for the project from Tennis Europe (formerly ETA).

2. BACKGROUND

The dropout problem - causes, consequences and approaches to the problem

1. Why do so many girls drop out?

2. How to get more girls to start playing and prevent so many from leaving?

The term "dropout" is used here to describe girls who drop participation in tournaments, or who drop membership of their club or, at worst, completely stop playing tennis.

The reasons for dropping out will by and large be psycho-social, for instance values and attitudes, organisational factors, for instance in the clubs, the role of the coaches, or general factors in the community (e.g. other recreational activities, matters related to family and friends, to school or education.)

3. DIFFERING ATTITUDES TOWARDS GIRLS AND BOYS

3.1. LITTLE SELF-CONFIDENCE AS A RESULT OF NEGATIVE EXPECTATIONS

Low self-esteem and little self-confidence among girls as a result of negative expectations is a psychological reason for dropping out that is registered again and again in most multi-sports studies (see source references at end). There is no reason to believe that tennis is any exception.

Where do these negative expectations come from - and why? By and large, it has to do with the attitude of parents - leaders - coaches - or the environment to the performance of girls in sports.

But what is the background for these negative attitudes towards girls? Sports in general, including tennis, are practised more or less on the boys` terms, and girls` performances are therefore compared with the performances of boys. This in turn means that girls` tennis is frequently seen in relation to traditionally "male" values, such as achievement in terms of winning or losing to an opponent, sharp focus on the competitive element, self-assertiveness, aggressiveness, etc.

This does not mean that girls cannot be just as performance and winner orientated as boys. But many need the environment around them to provide them with the expectation that they can succeed on their own terms. It is important to realise that too much focus on winning, in the sense of being better than others can be detrimental to motivation because the individual has no control over how good the opponents are. If they are better, the result can be a sense of defeat, and if they are not so good, the focus on own improvement may be lost. A focus on becoming the best of one`s potential is more under one`s own control. Winning over oneself by becoming better is more motivating because hard work will ensure success during the process of development. The result may be winning over others later, but one cannot start there.

These performance and winner-orientated values are frequently difficult to reconcile with the special needs that many girls have, for instance for socially secure environments and an inclusive community (particularly the community of girl friends).

Moreover, it may also be a question of a special need for more individual responsibility in relation to the goals and methods of the coaching programmes, greater variation in the exercises and activities that do not focus so much on the individual competitive situation.

In addition, it is about the need for a different role for the coaches, that includes a more comprehensive respect and care for the girls, not just for the player as a performer but also as a human being (an individual), who also has other needs and interests apart from sports (Fasting 1996, Kolnes 1992).

The disparity in what is expected of boys and girls has created the myth that the physical capacity of girls is less than that of boys.

Studies show that this is not the case, if we consider physical capacity in relation to the various physiological attributes of girls, with less weight less muscle mass, etc.

The myth that women are "the weaker sex," with special biological limitations such as less staying power, unable to tolerate as much hard training, becoming "masculine" with systematic training to improve strength, more frequent injuries, etc, has been disproved through research (Fasting, von der Lippe 1988).

Medical research in the U.S.A. shows that there are no biological or physiological reasons why girls cannot take part in the same sports as boys (Complete Conditioning for the Female Athlete, 2001). The physiological differences between girls and boys are linked to muscle volume and male hormones. This is shown particularly in connection with speed, resilience and muscular strength. In other word, comparisons between the sexes show that there are physiological differences, but the differences between girls and boys lie first and foremost on the psychological, mental and social levels.

How great these differences are may of course be discussed. But Federation Cup captain and coach of the Swedish ladies national team, Maria Strandlund, speaks about "The great difference" (coach symposium Stockholm 2000). The difference concerns, first and foremost, the different needs and interests of the girls compared to those of the boys. These differences coincide completely with those mentioned by Fasting and Kolnes in their studies.

Girls can be just as performance and winner orientated as boys but on the whole it looks as if most girls have a greater need for more social, community orientated values, such as a secure, inclusive community, more individual responsibility for the goals and methods of the coaching programme and more variation in training exercises. In addition, it is important that the role of the coaches includes showing more respect and care for girls, not only as performers but also as human beings.

This leads to, among other things, the need for more differentiated, individually tailored methods of motivation in both the sports and social environments, as well as in the general coaching programme. This means that there lies a responsibility and a challenge in both the role of the coach and in what the organisations have to offer in this field.

Fasting, Kolnes and Strandlund agree that there has been a positive development in recent years, so that the differences in needs of girls and boys are greatly reduced. The use of terms like "sex roles" and "sex identity" is less relevant now than it was in the 80s. What is important is that we are conscious of covering the needs which are still most typical in girls' sports, but which also are relevant for both genders. In this connection we choose to focus on special features in girls' tennis to be concentrated on, with a view to improving the training and competition situation.

When girls have their sports results compared with the boys', many girls experience a feeling of inferiority which acts as a barrier for further sports development. What this means is that many girls feel that they are not able to develop in their sport on their own terms. There is documentation in various sports to show that girls feel that they are not taken seriously, reportedly because of the way they tackle their sport. Such situations occur when male coaches expect quite different attitudes from the girls than the ones girls feel able to live up to.

Studies show that girls can be just as motivated as boys about performance and competition if the environment fosters in them positive expectations of success, on the basis of their own qualities.

What is ideal and desirable would be to combine social values (team building) with individually tailored training, where performance and winner orientated club and player development can be combined with individually tailored training programmes. (Marit Breivik, Dagbladet 9-11-02)

The national team coach in handball, Marit Breivik, with all her successes in World Championships as well as nationally, has proved that she knows how to combine the values mentioned above. But she has had the opportunity to work in this way over a long period, and the players have had good practice in learning to combine these values. This means that players need to be taught and to practise this method, and it can take time.

Another example, on the men`s side is Nils Arne Eggen`s success with the football team, Rosenborg, where his philosophy of creating a friendly atmosphere and reinforcing players` strengths, shows that individual performance development can be successfully combined with social values.

It is clear that it is easier to combine these values in team sports like handball and football than it is in tennis which is a typical individual sport. This does not mean that we should give up trying to succeed with this combination, both with regard to club development and the development of coaches.

How are the attitudes of girls and boys affected during their growth and development? It is socialisation while growing up, that is to say the upbringing in the home, influence from friends, school, media and different organisations (including sports clubs with their coaches) which form attitudes to girls` and boys` sports activities.

When it comes to attitudes that the media create, there is documentation showing that girls` and women`s sports get far less coverage than men`s sports.

The sum of the effects of the media and other aspects of the socialisation process is that the self-confidence of many girls is reduced, in relation to succeeding in sports.

With self-confidence we mean an attitude which makes it possible to make the most of ability and aptitude and even go beyond one`s limits. First and foremost it is the belief in and a feeling of mastery, either in relation to one`s own goals and/or others`.

Research in psychology provides documentation showing that self-confidence is a vital condition for the acquiring of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

But we can have self-confidence in very different areas and to varying degrees. All in all, low self-confidence in many areas can result in generally a low self-image. One`s self-image can be measured at different levels, for example; the perception of how valuable you are as a human being - how successful you are in relation to how you function in different walks of life.

This means that self-confidence is developed in relation to people`s personality, in other words, both what we are (qualities) and what we do (achievements).

3.2. AREAS WHERE SELF-CONFIDENCE IS AFFECTED

(Pensgård, Sørensen 1996)

3.2.1. EXPECTATIONS OF MASTERING SKILLS

The performer can either have expectations within themselves or from their environment.

If the expectations are unrealistic, i.e. there is too great a discrepancy between a player's level of ambition and level of performance, this can be a strain on their self-confidence.

The players themselves or their environment can sometimes place the level of ambition too high. It is important to strive to aim high, but not to the extent that players overtax themselves or focus more on winning over others than improving their skills.

Also there is the danger that players may play for the coach/parents or others in the environment. Thus the player will be "steered by others" which again is a strain on their self-confidence. Several sources indicate that this is one of the most common problems experienced when coaching most girls (Porter, 1989).

In addition to tennis being defined as a typical technical sport, it is also defined as being a highly mental game. Mental factors play an increasing role the higher the level gets. A popular definition of tennis is that it is a game in which "a player hits a ball with a tennis racket into a defined area, in a stressful situation."

Psychologically, stress can be both positive and negative, depending on how you tackle it, whereas pressure on the other hand is negative. "Stress for success," written by the American sports psychologist, Jim Loehr, deals with channelling stress to develop mental strength.

The pressure of expectations or competition pressure from coaches, leaders or parents is something that many girls experience as a big problem, possibly more than most boys. For this reason the cooperation in what Loehr calls "the winning combination" (player, coach, parent) is extremely important for most girls (see "Weakness in the social environment").

3.2.2. THE FEELING OF MASTERY

Many will claim that the feeling of mastery is what increases self-confidence more than anything else. This can be experienced at different levels, here especially through physical activities, e.g. in a sport like tennis.

On the whole it is a question of achieving the feeling of mastery in two main areas. The one area involves first and foremost winning over oneself, in the development of technical, physical, tactical or mental skills (i.e. development goals). These are goals the individual can control herself.

The second area involves winning over an opponent and as a result of this, achieving results and ranking-orientated performance goals.

In many cases it can be better that a coach works more on improving what is good rather than working on a weakness in a given situation. It can be for example because of psychological reasons, better to improve the best stroke rather than correcting the weakest stroke. This does not mean that the weakest stroke should not be corrected. This can be done at a later stage when it does not pose a threat to self-confidence.

3.2.3. DIFFERENT TYPES OF TEASING (SARCASM AND IRONY)

This involves two different types of teasing from coaches, parents or other players which teenage girls are especially sensitive to. One type of teasing is in the form of sarcasm, ridiculing a girl's body/looks. There is a close correlation between the way girls view their bodies and their self-confidence or self-image (Image Building for girls, Porter 1989). The word slimming for example should be taboo in this connection as it can increase the risk of eating disorders.

The other pitfall is teasing in the form of the ridiculing of players after "stupid" things have been done or said, especially in a group situation.

Another more sensitive area is so-called "sexual harassment," which one, of course, has no problem condemning.

In a wider context we can discuss physical contact between coach and player. Physical contact with a player is a form of communication which can be both negative and positive, depending on how the coach handles the physical contact as well as to what extent the player is able to accept such contact (e.g. age, maturity etc.) Physical contact can be so many things. Hugs, a pat on the shoulder, a handshake etc. are some examples. But when it involves a coach physically helping in repeating the action in a stroke, it is essential that the coach is cautious and is aware that children and youths can react very differently to this. Many girls are very sensitive and vulnerable when there is differential treatment in this area.

Even though grades for style are not awarded in tennis one should not disregard the fact that the look of the strokes can be of greater importance to girls than to boys and that this can affect self-confidence. It is clear that it is important to distinguish between the elegance of the stroke on the one hand and the effectiveness and precision of the stroke. But the aesthetic factor can, in many cases, mean a great deal for girls' motivation and self-confidence.

3.2.4. AWARENESS IN RELATION TO ROLE MODELS

Taking into account the social needs of many girls, role models can be a very important driving force in the development of self-confidence.

Leaders, coaches and top players, of both genders, can be role models for both girls and boys. This is one of the most important requirements for succeeding in training most girls (Rolley 2002).

Role models are important as a motivating force in relation to becoming as good as you can. Several coaching experts (e.g. Ron Woods, who was responsible for player development in the USTA) claim that the role model function is the most important condition for developing self-discipline.

According to many coaching experts, self-discipline is the most important quality (mental capacity) for a tennis player's development.

Self-discipline covers both self-confidence, self-control, purposefulness, self-awareness and respect for the opponent as well as for the work programme. In short, self-discipline means the ability to set goals for oneself and work as well as one can, with effort and purpose until the goals are reached. It involves value norms and a lifestyle which a player should strive after as well as identifying with.

But no one is perfect. The leader, coach and top players do not need to be, and should not pretend to be perfect. It is important that one is able to admit to faults but, at the same time, it is important that the leader, the coach and top players see the challenge in developing qualities which can act as a model for others. To be able to do this they should develop qualities such as openness, loyalty, fairness and sufficient self-awareness, i.e. know their strengths and weaknesses and take the consequences.

Studies in several sports, including tennis, show that girls in many cases prefer female coaches, first and foremost because they impart values which correspond more closely with the social needs and interests that most girls have. (Pøysti 1985)

Research shows that it is girls who have had a female coach who come upon the idea of becoming a coach themselves. (Female and male coaches in the eyes of elite female soccer players. Kari Fasting, Norway and Gertrud Pfister, Germany.)

We have several examples of female coaches who have been successful in Norwegian sports (eg. Grete Waitz and Marit Breivik). They serve as good female role models. Both represent ideals where there are possibilities for combining individual performance-orientated goals with healthy, human community values.

In this context therefore, the education and upgrading of female leaders and coaches, at all levels, is given high priority, in accordance with the Norwegian Tennis Association's Plan of Action.

3.2.5. THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK FOR SELF-CONFIDENCE

Feedback to players, especially from coaches/leaders, parents and the training environment generally, will mainly come at two levels or using a combination of these (see "Role of the Coach").

One type of feedback deals with personal praise and encouragement as a kind of social, emotional stimulus or confirmation.

The second type of feedback is directed more towards the achievement and execution of the sports activity.

In both areas negative feedback from the coach appears to damage girls' self-confidence more than boys'. Praise and encouragement on a personal level will, in most cases, mean more for girls than for boys.

Feedback that is too negative or corrective at the performance level seems to damage self-confidence more for girls partly because of their need for joint influence and self-control. It may also direct the attention toward the problematic issues rather than what to do in order to improve.

3.2.6. THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-CONTROL

This is first and foremost a feeling of "steering from within," independent of the judgement and expectations of the environment. For girls this can emerge in the form of the desire for more joint influence and responsibility in the choice of goals for the training and the content of the training. The extent to which a coach divides steering and joint responsibility in this area should take into account the age, maturity and motivation of the player. Documentation indicates that the need that girls have for joint influence is possibly greater than the need most boys have.

Self-control is an important part of the concept, self-discipline. As mentioned, it is claimed that this is the most important quality in a tennis player's development.

3.2.7. HOW THE INDIVIDUAL AND OTHERS DEFINE SUCCESS

But what is success and in relation to what? What is valued most? Success can be seen in relation to being successful in two main areas:

One area concerns a person's **performance aspect** (success in sport in relation to ranking, i.e. performance goals) or improvement in relation to individual skills at the physical, technical, tactical or mental level (i.e. development goals). A focus on improvement works best in order to keep up motivation.

The second area concerns **the personal aspect**, e.g. psychological qualities or personality traits such as honesty, good behaviour (fair play), the ability to win friends, the ability to co-operate or be creative etc.

4. CURRENT PRACTICE IN CLUBS, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Possible causes of dropout in club programmes?

In addition to "negative expectations" and a lack of self-confidence as causes for dropping out, it is apparent that what is available in the organisations, at various stages is less attractive for girls than for boys. There is no reason to suppose that this is not the case in Norwegian tennis clubs.

A number of studies, both national and international, show that girls from 6-10 years start out being just as interested in sport generally as boys. But it seems that the organising of the training and competitions, at various stages, is not well suited to the special needs of girls. Sometimes, for example, far too little effort is put into selecting groups of appropriate playing ability which will work harmoniously, as well as joint activities for creating a better environment. All in all, plans for club development tend to neglect the social aspect.

Research in the USA, in connection with Title IX, shows that if what is offered within the various sports is good enough, girls are just as interested as boys. (Title IX is a federal law requiring high schools and colleges to offer equal opportunities to both genders).

When what is on offer for girls (and boys) is not good enough, this can first and foremost be related to club plans or lack thereof.

4.1. CHALLENGES IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The training and competition environment in the club can be felt to be so lacking in stimulation that this is perhaps the most important cause of dropping out, especially among girls.

If the environment is not good, this may be related to the goals and priorities that the individual club has for its development. What is more important, a high level of activity for many and/or getting as many players as possible on the ranking? Which "philosophy" does the club choose e.g. how much weight is placed on each of the three most important goals, the goal of social enjoyment, the goal of individual development within the sport (physical, technical, tactical and mental) and the more measurable goal of results (ranking and competition results).

All documentation on this subject indicates that the enjoyment and development goals are more important for most girls than the ranking/competition goals.

Based on the wish to create a club environment more suited to women, with a stronger social profile, it is not difficult to see the physical limitations that most Norwegian tennis clubs have. We have a very long indoor season with few indoor courts. Quite a few indoor courts are in temporary structures which are not conducive to creating a good environment. The people in the club become therefore more important. The feeling of community, of belonging, of enjoyment and the joy of playing can make up for a lot. An important cue is good communication between those involved in club development.

Regarding communication, the motto "see and be seen" can appear banal but is in fact very important especially where girls are involved, based on experience we have from different sports and school environments. Just a simple thing like eye-contact, perhaps also with a smile or "hello" are among the everyday things that are sadly lacking in many clubs. Such apparently small, everyday things can be enough to make people feel that the club environment is "cold" and unwelcoming.

As girls place so much importance on social relationships, having friends in the club environment means a great deal, as well as having adequate contact with the coach. On the whole girls are more concerned about contact and solidarity than most boys. Moreover, girls prefer smaller groups and enjoy having "best friends."

Concerning the social network in the club, coaches should be especially aware of encouraging girls to make friends. For girls, the friends form a safe haven. The way girls engage in sports is not always the same as boys. Instead of the girls' way being valued for what it is, their "way" is often interpreted as a flawed version of the boys' way. What is interpreted by many as a problem among girls is often caused by girls' strength in showing care and understanding for each other, with their capacity for compassion and respect (Kolnes 1992).

With the idea of creating a more social club environment, it is obvious that all types of social gatherings, for all ages and for both genders, are positive. But in the youth culture of today, with the many leisure offers that are to be found outside the club environment, it is not always easy to find just the right formula for today's youth. In Norwegian tennis it will be a challenge for each club to find various different formulas, depending on the individual economic and physical/material requirements, traditions and needs in the local environment.

Both the Orienteering Association and Oslo and Akershus Regional Sports Association have started their own girls' project which has, so far, been a success. Svein Erik Munkelien, in the Regional Association, says that an important cause of dropping out is that the club environment has been too small and not well enough organised. Since starting the girls' project, they have found that there is a close correlation between social values in the environment and the quality of the sports training. "Girls are often dependent on a social environment in order to perform. They like, therefore, to be several in a group. Girls perform best, function best and are happiest in a group," says Munkelien. (Aftenposten 19-12-02)

The idea of club environments being more socially adapted is part of the background for the Norwegian Tennis Association's plan of action for clubs (see "Girls' Tennis Project" Norwegian Tennis Association, 2002). In this plan 3 main areas are indicated: 1. Recruiting girls and good follow-up schemes. 2. Educating more female coaches. 3. Start a mixed league for each age group (team tennis).

As a supplement to the 3 main areas, we can mention:

a. Information and educational courses within the framework of "the winning combination" (players, coaches/leaders and parents). These courses should first and foremost aim to develop mental and social skills (both individually and in groups) where consideration to girls' development and their role in relation to tennis is given priority.

One of the reasons for the importance of this cooperation is that the parents have a far greater opportunity than the coach to influence their children`s attitudes, during joint activities e.g. at mealtimes or other time spent together.

It is no coincidence that Jim Loehr`s book "The winning combination," deals with this cooperation triangle as an extremely important instrument for tackling the pressure of expectations and competition pressure, especially among girls. Loehr says that he does not see the point of training young competition players without being in regular contact with the parents of each player. The information and educational plan within this cooperation triangle should therefore be compulsory in all club development.

Experience shows that parents, on behalf of their children, often choose tennis as 2nd or 3rd choice in competition with other sports which have a higher status in the local environment. Thus tennis can lose out where there is a choice of different ball games. The chances are therefore reduced for recruiting players at all levels, especially the ones who have the greatest potential for becoming good competition players.

Trials in schools show that parents are an extremely important target group with regard to influencing attitudes and thus motivating the young people of today to embark on different types of activity and achievement. (Aftenposten 23/11-02) Not least, it can be important in a sport like tennis where attitudes and approach, as well as other mental factors, have a greater role than in most other sports.

In the youth culture of today, the role of the parents is extremely important in relation to what young people choose in the form of activity. (Utdanningen, No 5 -2002) In puberty, it is generally the parents, if they wish to be involved, who choose the activities that the children should concentrate on. It is the mother in particular who is the trendsetter in the choice of activities. This means, in practice, that it is important that parents are offered a course in tennis in the clubs, so that they, in turn, (hopefully) can influence the children to choose tennis.

b. Courses for girls only, as part of player development for all age groups, in addition to the usual courses for both girls and boys. Many of the Sports Associations report on having very positive results from courses for girls only. This means that Norwegian tennis should offer this to a larger extent than earlier.

c. Joint club events (involving both tournaments and social events), perhaps first and foremost in the local environment but also in the rest of the country. In the same way, exchanges with foreign clubs would of course be very popular and would help to strengthen club identity.

With regards to other possible causes for dropping out, in the club organisations, we can also direct our attention to other areas, such as:

4.2. CHALLENGES IN THE SPORTS ENVIRONMENT

4.2.1. TOO MUCH FOCUS ON THE BEST PLAYERS

In practice this means exaggerated preferential treatment of the players with the best possibilities for development, so that neither the "next best" players nor the ones after them are adequately catered for. This is especially risky in relation to recruiting girls in clubs which focus too much on the best players in the top competition group and by so doing can exclude many. It doesn't take much, especially for girls, to feel "lonely" as a result of differential treatment from coaches. There is not much room for those with lower ambitions and less possibilities for development. If these are not catered for, it is very likely that there will be both a fall in membership and in participation in competitions. Psychologically, the player will experience a fear of failure in a training environment which concentrates on talent spotting (in the negative sense) and on a high degree of performance and competition focus.

Furthermore it is important to look after the next best players because they represent an extremely important group with regard to creating a good environment, as well as providing support for the better competition players in the club.

Mutual support is the key to strengthening the team feeling and feeling of belonging in a club.

4.2.2. THE PRESSURE OF COMPETITION, EARLY TOURNAMENT EXPERIENCE AND SPECIALISATION AT TOO EARLY AN AGE

There can be too much pressure, for example before the age of 12 with a player development that is far too ranking and result orientated and where there is a pressure of expectation in the competition environment which the child is not capable of dealing with or is not mature enough to cope with. There is clear documentation that the dropout percentage is higher for children who begin with international and national, prestigious tournaments relatively early rather than choosing a later debut. The Williams sisters, Venus and Serena are examples of players who have chosen (probably the parents' choice) a later experience of tournaments in their player development.

It has been proved that most girls do not cope with the pressure of expectations and competitions as well as boys. This is a problem which is discussed in international organisations, for example the WTA Age Eligibility Commission Report 1994 which refers to rules aiming to reduce competition pressure, in connection with early competition experience.

In this context it is a challenge to develop mental skills in girls in order to enable them to cope with expectation and competition pressure. At the same time one can aim to get girls used to competition pressures via "safe" competition experiences. This can be done, for example, by avoiding the knock-out system in individual tournaments and preferably concentrating on doubles, handicap and different types of group games e.g. round robin tournaments. (See the Norwegian Tennis Association's plan of action).

Does this mean that team play and making individual competition "safe" can successfully be combined with the individual's winner and performance motivation? As mentioned, we have documentation showing that these more socially adapted motivation methods, with the main

focus on community values, can be combined with tough, individual performance demands and a "winner culture," (e.g. Breivik, Eggen).

A current debate is about competition pressure, early tournament experience and specialisation at a young age. The debate is linked to the regulations for children`s sports passed by the Norwegian Sports Association many years ago. These stipulate, among other things, that children under 12 may not take part in national tournaments. The principle that children from the age of 8-9 should be all-rounders is accepted and at the same time there is a warning against specialising too early. The all-round principle states that from the age of 8-9 there should be all-round activity aiming to give an introduction to and instruction in different sports.

The Head of the Norwegian Elite Sport Programme, Bjørge Stensbøl, as well as Finn Aamodt are critical of this arrangement. They believe that there is no clash of interests between this and allowing children to choose a special sport at an early age, so-called "all-round specialisation."

The grounds for this argument are that this could stimulate more physical activity for many, perhaps 20-25 hours a week, that is to say not only organised but to a larger extent unorganised activity (play).

Another reason is that children of this age learn skills much more quickly and easily in the so-called "golden age of motoric development" before puberty and thus form the basis for more experiences of mastering and further development of skills later, especially in technical sports. (Aftenposten 20-12-02)

There have been objections, especially to the argument that early specialisation leads to more physical activity for many. The critics point out that early specialisation and tournament experience leads to unreasonable competition pressure, "professionalizing of child sports," an unnatural and inappropriate developmental approach as practised in the former East Germany, sport for the few and so on. Furthermore criticism is directed at over-ambitious leaders, coaches and parents as well as warning of the danger of the commercialisation of child sports. (Dagbladet, 23-12-02)

It is clear that there will be a discussion about the degree of spontaneity in children`s choice of special sports at an early age, and whether or not coaching is open to everyone or only open to a selected few, chosen by over-ambitious coaches.

The Principal at The Norwegian Sports University, Gunnar Breivik says that acceptance for early specialisation has grown in recent years. Furthermore, like Stensbøl, he is not scared that starting early will create more losers.

It is important that responsible coaches are involved when children choose their favourite sport and that the terms of the choice are known to all parties, also the parents. Gunnar Breivik says that one can just as well create losers in a sport like football, if the team is at the top and someone must sit on the bench. Furthermore he believes it is still, today, more acceptable to go in for early specialisation in art and culture than in sport. Many seem to think that a talent in art must be developed as soon as it is discovered. If, on the other hand, some children work hard to be good in a sport, then people frown and think that it is not very healthy, says Breivik. (Vårt Land 20-12-02)

Andreas Morisbak, responsible for development in the Norwegian Football Association, supports Breivik inasmuch as it cannot be correct to regard sport differently from art and culture. What is important is that children must be able to choose sport independently, on the basis of desire and interest. This applies to everyone, whether they can/want to be good or not. Morisbak says that the directives for child sports are out of date and should be re-evaluated based on other suppositions, among other things the differentiation between various sports. It is a matter of differentiating between power/endurance sports and more complex, technical ball games like football and tennis. (Dagbladet 6-2-039)

Professor Odd Kjærmo who worked at the Norwegian University of Sport believed that there is no professional documentation to show that early specialisation leads to burn out and dropout. On the contrary, there is a greater chance of being successful if one specialises early, especially in the technical sports. The main problem may not be in a self-directed engagement in a particular sport, but more in the degree of pressure from adults.

Competition, including coping with defeat, and going on to perform better later are important things to learn about at an early age and form an important part of the socialisation process. Focusing on skill development and enjoyment rather than outperforming others is important here. The Norwegian Sports Association is mistaken in generalising about sports instead of distinguishing between the different sports.

Ball games, for example, require motor skills like feeling, timing and hand-eye coordination, as opposed to typical power and endurance sports. It is a relatively accepted opinion that motor skills are more easily learnt in the "golden age of motoric development."

Children and their parents must to a greater extent be able to choose sports independently, as well as how early they wish to start, independent of the laws, believes Olav Haraldseid (Norwegian Table Tennis elite group.) (Norwegian Sports Association`s statutes for children`s sports)

There are, in other words, arguments both for and against the use of different methods, about when tournament experience should start, what kind of competition it should be and how it should be organised. It is most important not to lose sight of the aim of children growing up and developing naturally without any abuse or inappropriate developmental practises.

In the context of a debate, competition pressure and specialisation belong together, but from a professional point of view there is a clear divide between early specialisation of skills on the one hand and early competition experience on the other. (See themes for discussion.)

4.2.3. NOT ENOUGH CHALLENGES FOR TALENTED PLAYERS

This involves a group of players who both wish to and are capable of doing better than average. Clubs can go too far in allowing the weakest to decide the tempo and quality of player development. There can be a misunderstood philosophy of equality which does not favour those with the greatest potential. Studies show that dropping out among girls can be related to a lack of challenging tasks involving the experience of mastering skills. The answer, of course, is that everyone should have the same opportunities and offers, as far as that is possible, but that differentiated development tasks should be given to the players.

Differentiation and individualisation are the cue words in the struggle to get player development to suit as many levels as possible, as well as individual needs. Research shows that this is especially important in relation to girls. It is a challenge to both club leaders and coaches, which goals and priorities are chosen, e.g. in the balance between the goal of social well-being, the goal of individual development and the more measurable ranking and competition goal.

4.2.4. DEFICIENCY IN BASIC TECHNIQUE IN PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

There is an unsatisfactory guarantee of quality in the development of technical skills, especially involving the so-called "basic technique," which is an expression covering healthy technique at all levels. The Norwegian Tennis Association has chosen this as an important area of focus in future player-development. As well as basic technique being unsatisfactory, it is necessary to develop a greater range of strokes earlier in player-development. Experience shows that both of these aspects have a more negative effect on girls than boys, first and foremost because boys are physically stronger and can develop more individual styles of play. Therefore the development of a healthy basic technique and a wider repertoire of strokes, at as early an age as possible, is extremely important for girls. The repertoire should be developed with simple stroke execution, a moderate degree of spin and with less individual deviation in relation to healthy basic technique.

In recent years we have had a development in Norwegian tennis which shows a far too unprofessional coaching of young players in relation to developing a healthy and correct basic technique. Among other things this is due to insufficient loyalty and an unprofessional application of the norms and methods which have been taught to coaches by the Norwegian Tennis Association during the last 15 years.

4.2.5. WEAKNESS IN TENNIS SCHOOLS

Tennis schools vary a good deal, depending on age and level of proficiency, but on the whole they are beginner groups for 7-12 year olds.

In tennis schools, girls' self-confidence is affected early on, according to how much attention they receive from the coach. Boys, on the whole, are more active and extrovert in a group situation. The coach should therefore be extra careful about giving as much attention to the girls as to the boys.

There is no disagreement among experts that the most important aim of this type of tennis school is to provide the child with a safe, sociable and inspiring environment for learning, where there is a healthy balance between playing and learning. This means that there should be learning of different skills, an entertaining variety of exercises combined with good opportunities for making new friends. "Winning friends" is especially worth noting. This is one of the main aims of the Australian programme for recruitment: "MILO Evonne Goolagong Getting Started Program," which primarily aims to attract girls.

The scheme emphasises the importance of visiting schools in the local environment. There is close contact between the coaches in the clubs and teachers in the schools while recruiting, especially girls, also with a view to them becoming members of the local clubs.

It is worth noting the order and relationship between the different aims behind the well-known American recruiting programme. The aims are to learn "the basic skills while having fun and making new friends." The learning of skills is mentioned first, together with the fact that this should be fun and there should be opportunities for making friends. In other words, a tennis school should be not only "a place to be but also a place to learn."

Learning various coordination skills at this tennis school level is especially important, since it has been shown that children today, have far worse basic physical skills than earlier. Research shows also that most girls have worse basic coordination skills than boys. The main cause of this is that girls get less training in developing skills like hand-eye coordination, throwing ability, balance etc while growing up. Various types of coordination exercises are therefore especially important for girls at an early age, with a view to "training trainability." This means forming as good a foundation as possible for a later development of more specific training of technique, which is extremely important in a technical sport like tennis. The Norwegian Elite Sport Programme, which has assisted Norwegian tennis in recent years, has this coordination basis as its main goal. This forms the basis then for more specific technique training in tennis, at later stages.

A danger with the tennis schools is that they act as "money making machines" for the club, that is to say, the more the children, the more money the club earns, irrespective of how much they learn. The scheme should also form a basis for the recruiting and further development of players, in other words, a possibility offered as an incentive for the children to continue to the next level. This does not mean that there should be an exaggerated selection process at the tennis school level, in the sense that some feel excluded while others may continue. We should have the principle that as many as possible are offered the same coaching, but there must be more opportunities for differentiating training at an earlier level than has been the case in Norwegian tennis. In my opinion, we have failed as much in this aspect as we may have failed in the principle of "the same opportunity for everyone."

All-round play is extremely important at an early age, but not as an aim in itself. The balance between this and more specific learning must not be left too late. As mentioned, studies show that the mastery of skills, not only social enjoyment, is very important for maintaining motivation in girls and preventing dropout.

With a view to method, it is important to have a balance between group activities and individual exercises for skills in order to keep up motivation in training and competition. In our education of coaches, which is influenced by the American method "Standard Method-PTR," it is important that the joint activities in the group teaching are combined with individual instruction. This requires good organisational skills in group teaching. When this is successful, we get group exercises, with the special motivation these give to girls, combined with individual instruction, during the lesson.

4.2.6. LACK OF PLANNING WHEN FORMING GROUPS (INTEGRATION PROBLEM)

Should girls and boys be together or separated in groups? There is no ready made answer to this. Many factors are relevant, not least age, maturity and level of skills. It is therefore extremely important to have good knowledge and experience in the question of integration and/or segregation, when forming groups. The solution of the integration problem can be of vital importance for motivation, not least among girls, for whom social relationships can be of huge importance.

The lower the age and level of skills, the greater is the argument for dividing (segregating) boys and girls in groups.

It can often be advantageous having beginner groups with only girls because they feel safer about their ability and are able to feel solidarity with the others more than if they were together with boys.

At a higher level of skills, there is often a tendency to arrange for the talented girls to practise with boys because of their greater strength and speed. This is done with a view to improving the girls' level of play. If this is overdone, however, there is a danger that the girls will get less opportunity to develop aggressiveness and practise building up an attack, in order to be able to dominate an opponent. It is precisely this aggressiveness that very many girls, playing at higher levels, need to develop. This is an argument that girls, also at this level, should practise a lot with girls (Van Aken 2003).

In some cases it can be frustrating for girls to be placed in groups with younger boys on the grounds that the level of skills in a group should be similar.

Sometimes it can be right to put girls and boys of the same age together, but where the boys have a somewhat lower level of skills. This can give the girls more self-confidence and at the same time one is spared from hearing the boys say "they're not good enough."

For other girls, being together with boys of the same age can be the most important motivation, even though there may be a large difference in proficiency.

Boys can react in the same way, depending on what is important for their motivation, the social needs or the sport.

Regarding different activities where it is possible to mix the genders, we refer to the Norwegian Tennis Association's plan of action for clubs in the "Girls' Tennis Project." In this suggestions are offered for the solution of different questions of organisation. One of the aims of the plan of action is introducing a mixed league in each age group. Girls and boys play together in a team, where mixed doubles is an important part of the set-up. Belgium and Holland are the only European countries not experiencing a fall in the number of tennis players. Both of these countries have had an extensive and professional set-up for a mixed league for many years.

5. THE ROLE OF THE COACH

An earlier American Tennis President claimed that "the tennis coach is the all-important factor in the work to get people to start playing tennis and getting them to continue playing" (preventing drop-out).

The Norwegian plan for top level sport points to "the athlete as the centre of attention" and "the 24-hour athlete" as their basic concepts. With knowledge of these concepts and of the needs of most women/girls it is clear that the role of the coach is exceedingly important, though as a "means to an end," a resource and an instrument in the development of the player as the main element.

Recent studies in schools show that the role of the teacher appears to be of more importance now than earlier, more important, for example, than text books and teaching methods. This can be related to new trends in today`s child and youth culture. This also concerns sports generally, of course, including tennis.

We have seen that most girls have a greater need for contact with the coach than many boys and that the expectations that girls have of the coach are different from those of most boys. The expectations involve the role of the coach and how the aim should be to develop the whole athlete , including the mental and social aspects in addition to the sports aspect. This is what is incorporated into the notion of a "coach" as opposed to an instructor, with whom we associate first and foremost the development of skills, such as technique, footwork etc.

The U.S.T.A has therefore chosen the word "coach" as the ideal collective notion for what should be expected of a trainer (syllabus for education of Norwegian coaches, Levels 1,2 and 3.) "Coach" is then an abbreviation for the five main areas.

- Comprehension (knowledge etc.)
- Outlook (vision, philosophy)
- Affection (emotional involvement)
- Character (role-model)
- Humour

Another attempt at summing up the important qualifications/qualities of a coach is to be found in the Norwegian Sports Association`s Instructions for Coaches:

- Knowledge
- Ambition/motivation
- Empathy

In the following section we shall deal with different aspects of the role of the coach which can have both negative and positive effects in relation to "coaching girls."

5.1. "SHOW AUTHORITY WITHOUT BEING AUTHORITARIAN"

How active is the coach in relation to wanting to influence the player during the learning process? How much "guidance" is there in relation to letting the players experience and find things out for themselves?

The degree of guidance is about how "democratic" the coach should be. What is clear is that the needs of the players are very different in this question. Generally we can say that "the coach should be an authority without being authoritarian," in other words neither too democratic nor too authoritarian.

All of this is, of course, dependent on the player's age, maturity and motivation for different degrees of "guidance."

A documented cause of dropout is what many girls experience as a far too authoritarian, coach centred and undemocratic style of coaching, which some male coaches have.

Having the right to be consulted or having joint influence are pointed out as much wanted factors that are often absent, even though the age and maturity of the players indicate that this would be natural. What is called for is the capability and desire to give players joint influence and responsibility in the choice of goals and in the training and competition plans. It looks as if this is probably more important for girls than for boys.

In addition, it looks as if girls also need more individual training and instruction, in other words, more differentiated training tasks.

This becomes also a question of organisation, based on the material and economic framework, being able to divide better according to level and form groups which function well.

Another aspect of the style of coaching, as related to girls, is that there should probably be a greater use of a more easy going style in normal lessons. It is claimed that, in many cases, more breathing space should be given between exercises. This gives the girls the opportunity to talk to each other, but, of course, without it disrupting the structure and learning effect of the lesson. Research into the brain shows that women generally can take in more information than men because information is received on both sides of the brain, whereas men, on the whole, only receive on one side. This can mean that women have more they need to talk about than men. Although women can take in more information, it can then be very difficult managing to focus on what is most important. Experience shows that the coach should be very careful to concentrate on one fundamental point at a time, in player development (Rolley 2002).

As well as the question of the authoritarian style of coaching being a cause of dropout, there is also the situation, already mentioned, where many male coaches concentrate solely on performance, measured according to ranking and results. This is shown to drive many girls and boys away. Players feel that this emphasis on performance, with the focus on winning or losing to an opponent is given higher priority than individual progress, development, effort and will (development goals.) In other words, the fight against the opponent is more important than the fight with oneself.

Most girls, however, attach more importance to competing with themselves.

According to the Norwegian model for first class sport, the plan is that the "process," i.e. the development or the "way" to the aim, is the most important for top performances. The end result comes as a consequence of the means. The stress must be on the right process and then the end results will be achieved.

5.2. HEALTHY AND CORRECT COMMUNICATION

A number of studies, through interviews, show that the coach`s inability to communicate in different circumstances, can be an important cause for girls dropping out. This applies especially for male coaches.

It is indicated that there is a lack of ability when it comes to active listening, as well as so-called following-up, positive feedback, a sense of justice, empathy, solving conflicts and providing humour etc.

As indicated earlier, it is the emotional, mental and social needs which are not adequately taken care of. Generally, girls have a greater need for a caring coach. There is a need to be respected as a complete human, not merely as a performer of a sport. It is important to emphasise that the coach should not only have sports qualifications but also knowledge of human nature. In this context, we can quote a comment from a male player. He believes that what typifies a bad coach is "too much one-way communication and a lack of knowledge and understanding of human nature. If a coach does not have this, he is worth nothing." (Kolnes, Halvorsen, Bø 1991)

What do we mean by healthy and correct communication?

5.2.1. ACTIVE LISTENING

There should be so-called two-way communication between coach and player. We talk about "transmitters" and "receivers" in communication between the two. Unfortunately, some coaches only have "transmitters." We have one mouth and two ears. Should we, perhaps, therefore listen at least twice as much as we speak?

"Conversation" or "dialogue" is a current theme in today`s debate about schools. Individual talks with students are used more and more as an important means of strengthening motivation for learning and preventing young people from losing interest in school and dropping out. There is reason to believe that this also applies in sport, including tennis.

5.2.2. BETTER FOLLOW UP

On the social, emotional level, girls have special needs, that is to say so-called "follow up." This means that the coach not only "follows up" at tournaments but also shows interest in other aspects of the player, besides the tennis aspect (e.g. family, friends, hobbies, education etc.) This again means that the coach cares, not only about the social network that the player has in the club environment but also outside it. Everything points to the fact that this is more important for most girls than it is for boys. If this is absent, the dropout percentage increases.

At the same time, it is important that the coach does not pry too much into private matters, but shows proper care and respect for privacy.

5.2.3. GIVE POSITIVE FEEDBACK

With regard to feedback from the coach in player-development, we distinguish between feedback which involves specifically the sports and performance aspects, while the other type of feedback involves the social, emotional aspects of the player, especially praise and encouragement at the personal level.

Negative feedback from the coach in both of these areas would seem to destroy self-confidence more in girls than in boys. Praise and encouragement on the personal level means, in most cases, more to girls than to boys.

Feedback which is too negative or corrective seems to destroy self-confidence more in girls than in boys. Good advice is positive, but if there is too much of it, it can be a strain in relation to the need "to find things out for oneself." It seems that girls, to a greater extent than boys need to know why things are to be done this way or that. At the same time, many sources indicate that most girls are more loyal and conscientious in their training than boys.

Girls, on the whole, are more vulnerable and can react more emotionally to criticism. In addition, they can be more critical of themselves, both on the personal and the sports/performance level. (Kolnes 1992) As we have mentioned, this means that feedback from the coach should aim to strengthen what is already good, especially in the beginning, rather than correct a weakness. This can be dealt with later.

As mentioned, there are two pitfalls involving communication, which coaches should be particularly careful about:

These are "teasing," irony regarding girls' bodies/looks and "stupid" things which are said or done, especially in a group.

It is especially important that feedback, in the form of encouragement and praise, both on a personal and sports/performance level, is given in the right doses, in the right place and at the right time!

5.2.4. SHOW RESPECT AND TREAT ALL PLAYERS THE SAME (SENSE OF JUSTICE)

Fair play is something that girls are particularly concerned about, especially equal treatment and fairness when it comes to the coach's attention and interest in relation to each player. In this way, they feel they are shown respect and taken seriously. Girls are especially vulnerable where favouritism and difference in treatment is involved.

5.2.5. SHOW CONSIDERATION AND SYMPATHY (EMPATHY)

A study concerning the role of the coach, carried out some years ago by the Norwegian Sports Association, shows that the capacity for empathizing was the quality that most players felt was missing in most coaches.

It involves the coaches having "a means of communication" which can be used when talking about and understanding players' feelings, like insecurity, fear, vulnerability etc. Girls often have a greater need to express their feelings than boys. If girls are to be able to perform and function together with others, it is important to take these needs into account.

5.2.6. BE OPEN AND DIRECT WHEN SOLVING CONFLICTS

On the whole, girls are more vulnerable and react to criticism in a more emotional way. In addition, they can be more critical of themselves than most boys. Also, they often have problems differentiating between objective and personal criticism. The coach, therefore, should be careful about the way in which criticism is presented. Furthermore, the coach should notice, as early as possible, signals that indicate that there is a conflict. The coach should then be direct, open and honest when seeking to solve it. Girls are not always good at saying what is on their minds, and this can lead to sulking and talking behind backs among the girls. This again can lead to jealousy and suspicion among the girls. One of the reasons girls are not good at saying what is bothering them is that they are scared about how the coach will react if he is criticised. (Kolnes 1992)

5.2.7. SHOW HONEST AND POSITIVE BODY LANGUAGE

Experience shows that more than half of the communication between people, e.g. between coach and player, takes place without words (non verbal). "Actions speak louder than words" is a relevant slogan in this connection. The coach should therefore be aware that facial expressions, mime, movements of the arms, hands and head, can express messages to the player more than words. There should therefore be correlation between what the coach says and what is signalled through body language. Otherwise there will be double communication, which can have a negative effect. An example of this can be that the coach smiles at the same time as saying something which one would not normally smile about. Body language should be realistic and signal openness, honesty, credibility and a positive attitude.

5.2.8. SPREAD HUMOUR AND HAPPINESS

It is perhaps bold to claim that this is more important in relation to girls than to boys. However, as this involves feelings and enthusiasm, it is clear that we have, here, an especially important means of creating motivation, in the struggle to get people to start playing tennis and to get them to continue.

The coach`s ability to spread humour and happiness in lessons cannot be over-estimated. As it has been proved that fear of not performing well is more common among girls than among boys, it can be important to remember that humour is effective in reducing stress levels and thus influencing the player`s level of tension in a positive way.

"Laugh and win" is the title of a well-known and reputable textbook, written by the American coaching expert, Vic Braden.

Training should be serious and disciplined but not to the extent that there is no room for a smile. Many coaching experts will certainly claim that humour and happiness are the most important "tools" that the coach has as a means of building motivation in all player-development. As one of the world`s leading tennis psychologists, Jim Loehr, says: "If players do not experience tennis as being fun, we can forget everything we are doing in player development!"

6. ALTERNATIVE LEISURE ACTIVITIES (FRIENDS, SCHOOL ETC.)

Giving priority to friends, school/education rather than to sport, whether it is merely for exercise or at top level, can also be an important reason for dropout.

Non-commercialised amateur sport has, traditionally and historically, always had a solid position in a country like Norway. On the whole there are clear opinions in people`s minds that school/education should be given priority, over sport. It is also clear that girls, in the society of today, have both greater opportunities and greater needs for higher education. This means that girls can, to a larger extent, decide to give priority to education rather than sport, including tennis.

Another reason for dropping out can be related to what is popularly called "the battle for young people`s leisure time." This involves the many tempting activities outside established, organised sport in the Norwegian Sports Association (health studios, aerobics, running, snowboard etc.) Membership of the various sports associations (e.g. the Norwegian Tennis Association) can therefore suffer losses. Exercise outside organised sport is suitable for girls, so that their needs are satisfied to a greater extent than in established, organised sports. The exercise is not competition orientated and the emphasis is on the training environment having a spirit of community, play and enjoyment (Fasting 1996). The various other sports are therefore struggling with the same problems of dropout as tennis, except for some sports like football and basketball. The increasing percentage of women in football, both players, coaches and leaders, is presented as a model. There should be useful advice to be gained here for the other sports which are struggling with dropout problems. Several of the sources for this compendium are from research into football.

7. SUMMARY

Here are some of the main points about the causes of dropout, based on international and national sources (tennis and other sports):

7.1. NEGATIVE EXPECTATIONS AND LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

The most important psychological reason seems to be that girls' self-confidence is reduced as a result of negative expectations in the environment. Girls are not expected to do well in sport, to the same extent as boys, first and foremost because girls' results are compared to boys'.

Thus myths arise about the physical capacity of girls being much worse than that of boys, without taking into account girls' physical capacity in relation to the physiological differences between girls and boys. Many girls feel that they are not "taken seriously" and are not able to go in for their sport on their own terms.

The negative expectations are a result of the socialisation process while growing up. Girls' social and emotional needs in the training and competition context are not adequately respected and taken care of. At the same time, it is clear that many girls can be just as performance and winner orientated as boys if they are met with expectations of success on their own terms.

The negative expectations are mainly a result of the fact that sport generally and traditionally is male dominated, both in the case of players, coaches and leaders. It is difficult for many girls, as players, to identify themselves with the dominating value norms of "defeating opponents" combined with a sharp focus on performance/ranking. This can, of course, apply to boys, but documentation indicates that it applies to most girls.

- The ideal aim must be to combine a performance and winner orientated development with the more emotionally and socially suited value norms that are typical for girls' sport. The coach for Norwegian women's handball, Marit Breivik, is an example of someone who has succeeded with this combination.
- Self-confidence appears to be an extremely important pre-condition for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- Self-confidence is affected in areas like:
- The expectation of mastery ("the winning combination" is relevant here in order to reduce stress and influencing youngsters' attitudes, also regarding the choice of sport at an early age).
- The experience of mastery (distinguishing between the struggle against opponents, i.e. ranking and result orientated aims and the struggle with oneself, i.e. development aims.)
- Different types of teasing (involving body/looks and other ridiculing when in a group.)
- Awareness in relation to role models:
- (Important for developing self-discipline, including self-confidence.) Many girls prefer female coaches. The education and further training of female coaches is therefore important.

- The importance of feedback for self-confidence (distinguishing between two types of feedback: personal praise and encouragement on the one hand and feedback related to performance or execution of technique.)
- The feeling of self-control (experiencing "steering from within," especially in the question of joint influence and responsibility in the choice of the aims and means of training.)
- What the individual and the environment define as "success" (distinguishing between personal qualities and the performance aspect of success.)

7.2. CURRENT PRACTICE NOT GOOD ENOUGH IN CLUBS AND ORGANISATIONS

Another important cause for dropping out is that what is on offer in clubs and organisations is not suited to many girls, either because of environmental or sports factors. The special social and emotional needs of girls are not sufficiently taken care of. Knowledge of and respect for these needs, among leaders, coaches and parents, is not good enough.

When what is on offer for girls (and boys) is not good enough this can be related to the following factors in club plans.

7.2.1. WEAKNESS IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT?

A weakness in the social environment is often reflected in a lack of goals and priorities in the club's plans for the future, e.g. what is most important in club development? Is the stress on ranking and performance goals, development goals and social/enjoyment goals? (Is the focus on the few elite players or on all players?)

When it comes to the environment, there should be more social gatherings of different types just for girls, but also some for both genders. The aim of this is to develop a better environment for girls and women in clubs. It is especially important to encourage friendship among girls as this provides security in club development.

- Various sports associations have had successful projects for girls.
- The plan of action of the Norwegian Tennis Association indicates 3 important areas where work is needed:
 - The recruiting of girls and good follow-up schemes.
 - Educating more female coaches.
 - Start mixed league for each age group.

As a supplement to these three main areas, we can mention:

- a. Information about and training in the use of the "winning combination."
- b. Courses for girls only.
- c. Club exchanges with clubs at home and abroad.

When it comes to other possible causes for dropping out to be found in club plans, we can direct our attention to the following:

7.2.2. WEAKNESS IN THE SPORTS ENVIRONMENT?

First and foremost this involves:

a. Too much focus on the most talented players in player development.

Preferential treatment of the best players at the expense of the "next best" players.

b. Competition pressure, early competition experience and specialisation at too early an age.

International rules, concerning the minimum age of children competing in international and national tournaments, have been passed in order to reduce this pressure. There are divided opinions about the Norwegian Sports Association's "child sports regulations," about early specialisation, about when competition experience should start, what kind of competition and how it should be organised in order to safeguard against an inappropriate developmental approach as practised in the former East Germany and misuse of children's natural growth and development.

c. Not enough challenges for the most talented players.

If the "philosophy of equality" is misunderstood, it can result in the absence of differentiated and individual training tasks.

d. Deficiency in basic technique in player development.

- It is a matter of developing a healthy, appropriate stroke technique and stroke repertoire at all levels. In this area, there has clearly been a reluctance of many coaches to follow the norms that the Norwegian Tennis Association have had in their education of coaches for the last 15 years. It is possible that the effect of this has been more negative for girls than for boys. The Norwegian Tennis Association has now chosen to concentrate their work on developing a healthy basic technique in the years to come.

e. Weakness in tennis schools.

It is important to have the correct balance between playing and learning.

There is a danger of tennis schools acting as "money making machines" for the clubs. It is important that tennis schools are not only a place to be but also a place to learn.

Group teaching can be combined with individual training tasks and the coaching of technique.

f. Lack of planning when forming groups.

In order to prevent girls from dropping out, it is especially important that groups are formed in a suitable way (integration and/or segregation.) Differences in gender, age, level, interest and possibilities for development must all be taken into account. Furthermore one must take into account which needs it is more important to take care of, the social/mental needs or those involving sport.

7.2.3 DIFFERENT ROLE FOR THE COACH

A third cause for dropping out involves the role of the coach. Several studies indicate that it is the role of male coaches that has driven many girls away. The following points are important in the role of the coach:

A. Show authority without being authoritarian!

B. Healthy and correct communication.

- Active listening!
- Better follow up!
- Positive feedback!
- Avoid teasing (irony.)
- Show respect and treat all players the same!
- Show consideration and sympathy (empathy.)
- Be open and direct when solving conflicts!
- Show honest and positive body language!
- Spread humour and happiness!

7.2.4. ALTERNATIVE LEISURE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

A fourth cause for dropping out can be the temptation to join alternative leisure activities outside organised sport (health studios, aerobics, snowboard etc.) Furthermore, an important cause for dropping out is the fact that school and education is generally given priority over sport.

7.3. AREAS OF GENERAL IMPORTANCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE PLAYERS

The following is a summary with the emphasis purely on tennis as a subject:

7.3.1. AIMS

The emphasis must be on development and task orientated goals (e.g. the development of skills for each individual in "the battle with oneself.") This should be given priority before performance and ranking orientated goals (defeating opponents.) The latter must be seen as a result of the preceding development process.

Short term, realistic goals are especially important with a view to experiencing the feeling of mastering technique and strengthening self-confidence. Dividing the training and competition plans into periods is also part of the set up, with a view to being able to measure progress.

7.3.2. TECHNIQUE

Developing a healthy basic technique, including a wide repertoire of strokes, is possibly even more important for girls than for boys because of physiological differences. With less physical power than boys, the repertoire of strokes should generally be developed with simple execution of strokes, a moderate degree of spin and less individual deviation from the basic technique. Correcting should on the whole aim to improve strengths, especially in the beginning. Correcting weaknesses can come later. The training of coordination at an early age should be given priority (improve basis for training.)

7.3.3. PHYSICAL ASPECT

The physical training can be just as "tough" as the boys', but on the girls' terms and based on their physical condition. It is important that the coach is open to different motivation methods, e.g. a large variety in different forms of training. The aim of the physical training should be the same but the "means" can be more varied.

7.3.4. MENTAL/SOCIAL ASPECT

The main aim of the mental training should be to develop skills which can improve self-confidence and, among other things, reduce the experience of negative expectations and competition pressure. In this respect, the "winning combination" is a powerful means of influence, in addition to the role of the coach and what clubs have on offer for girls. The main thing is to find individual methods for motivation and areas for developing sport with a view to developing self-confidence and thus being able to perform the best way possible.

It is essential to develop harmonious and appropriate groups (team building) in club development. It is a matter of finding the right balance between taking care of social/human needs in relation to performance.

7.3.5. METHOD (PROGRESSION)

In the technical development of strokes, the step by step learning (using for example the "part method" as well as the "whole method") can be very effective with a view to many experiences of mastering in order to strengthen self-confidence. In this connection, it is especially important to use a progressive method, aiming at developing a healthy, appropriate basic technique.

Especially at the higher levels of proficiency, the so-called "game based" method is now much used, that is to say using specific, match related exercises. This, like the "whole method," is an ideal course of action. The limitations lie in having to take into account the time factor, physical conditions, level of skills and motivation.

Other key points are more attention to the individual and differentiation.

7.3.6. ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF COMPETITION

It is important that, as the players grow up, the genders are integrated as much as possible in activities like mixed league, mixed doubles, all against all tournaments, handicap tournaments etc. On the one hand, it can be important to get used to competitions and gain tournament experience. On the other hand, it can be important to reduce anxiety for traditional knock out methods in tournaments through the use of alternative forms of competition. The competition elements are also reduced by, for example, measuring individual progress in training skills (e.g. winning points for reaching goals i.e. the "battle with oneself.")

7.3.7. CHOICE OF EXERCISES - MORE VARIATION AND HUMOUR

There should be a wide choice of exercises, combined with a large dose of humour and happiness. This is a key issue in all types of training and competition for girls.

7.3.8. DIFFERENT STYLE OF COACHING

The stress should be on a more socially adapted, democratic style of coaching, as opposed to the authoritarian style. The aim is to develop the entire person, with girls taken seriously and respected. Following up means showing interest in other aspects of the player, not only the performance aspect. Healthy and correct communication means: active listening, positive feedback, being open and credible in solving conflicts, positive body language and spreading humour and happiness. It can also mean being prepared to use a more easy going style of coaching in lessons, with possibilities for more breathing space between exercises, perhaps more time to chat, but only as long as this does not damage the structure and learning effect of the lesson.

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THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is the "winning combination" so important for girls?
2. Which areas are most important for developing self-confidence in most girls?
3. Which type of exercises are suitable for measuring progress in the "battle with oneself?"
4. How can different tendencies to tease be avoided?
5. How can we strike a balance between taking care of the "next best" players and stimulating those who want to go further and have a greater potential for development.
6. Discuss the argument concerning the problem of early tournament experience and so-called "early specialisation."
7. Discuss examples of how so-called basic technique (common norms for all levels) can collide with individual player styles and efficiency.
8. How can the tennis school plans cater for the most important need of the players, that is the social and physical needs as well as the need to learn skills?
9. Which practical exercises are good for developing suitable qualities in the coach? e.g.
 - i. **active listening**
 - ii. **following up**
 - iii. **positive feedback**
 - iv. **respect**
 - v. **sense of justice**
 - vi. **sympathy/empathy**
 - vii. **solving conflicts**
 - viii. **humour and happiness**
10. Which activities (in addition to those included in the Plan of Action) should be started in order to improve the environmental situation for girls in Norwegian tennis clubs?